DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 770 FL 017 967

AUTHOR Stones, Valerie
TITLE An Elementary Language Culture Program.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (New York, NY, April 6-9, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Educational Strategies; Elementary Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Introductory Courses; *Language Role; Program Descriptions; Second Language Learning; *World History

ABSTRACT

A five-year course sequence focusing on the relationship of language and culture in world history is described. The program, beginning in grade 3, prepares students for later study of foreign and classical languages, develops English language skills, and cultivates general cultural interest. At the first level, students are introduced to some common factors of culture: history, migration, customs and beliefs, and the normalcy of linguistic and cultural change. Six cultures are highlighted: Mexican, African, Chinese, Japanese, Indian subcontinental, and that of the classroom. Level Two begins by examining major influences on the modern world deriving from ancient Greece. Three major aspects of Greek culture are addressed: myth, cultural debt to ancient Greece, and development of the alphabet. Level Three examines Roman language and culture, and addresses such topics as dress, housing, the town, architecture, the zodiac, education, and the gods. These three levels emphasize active class participation. The fourth level ties Latin, French, and English together through study of Roman, Gallic, and Norman French history and continues to the cultural debt owed to later French history. Level Five addresses French cultural history from 1789 and then moves to basic Latin and French grammatical principles. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306770

AN ELEMENTARY LANGUAGE CULTURE PROGRAM

VALERIE STONES

MARCH 1989

ST EDMUND'S ACADEMY

5705 DARLINGTON ROAD

PITTSBURGH

PA 15217-1598

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (New York, NY, April 6-9, 1989).

FL 017967

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stones, V.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Three weeks into a new teaching position, I was astounded when the whole third grade leapt to its desks and cheered as I entered the room. Although in my twenty years of teaching students have leapt onto desks and shouted all sorts of things at me, never before have I wanted to draw attention to these incidents publicly. This was the first time that I had been welcomed so positively by a whole class. The reason for this reception was neither my personality nor the language I was teaching, since these factors had been constant for years. What was new was the approach I was using. I had written an elementary language culture sequence which drew upon my own long and varied life and teaching experience. The enthusiastic third grade was my pilot class and its response encouraged the writing of a five year preparatory language culture program, detailed below.

The five levels of the program function as building blocks increasing the students linguistic and cultural awareness. The overall aim of the program is that students will ultimately become better global citizens. That is to say, that they will have improved linguistic and cultural proficiency. A variety of subordinate language and culture goals all contribute to this principal aim. Since French is our upper school modern language offering, the content in the lower school focuses particularly on this language. However, the overall goals and method could very easily be adapted to include any other European language. The subordinate language goals aim primarily to prepare students for traditional language studies by presenting Greek, Latin, selected modern languages and English in a logical linguistic context. With this knowledge in hand, the students are introduced to grammatical principles common to the

languages they are likely to study. In addition they work on vocabulary and conversational proficiency. Simultaneously, cultural awareness is developed through a study of the development of the students' own American culture, with particular reference to the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and French.

Elementary students need to be prepared culturally and linguistically in order for them be committed to the rigors of upper school language. Unfortunately my language teaching experiences in college, high schools and middle school has led me to believe that most students are learning a language purely as a graduation requirement. Global prejudices are firmly entrenched by the time a child reaches eighth grade. For this reason, we need to begin globally oriented language and culture programs earlier. One reason why this has not been done successfully is that courses tend either to trivialize the material, rendering it meaningless, or they use inappropriate "text and talk" high school methods alienating the students. In contrast, the methods used to achieve the goals of my program are founded upon three basic observations. Firstly, little children learn best through play. Secondly, they respond well to new material presented in relation to their own lives. Thirdly, they view the world holistically. These mainstays of the kindergarten are wrongly discarded in much elementary teaching, thereby limiting the volume and complexity of material which can be covered. This is frequently true in language programs where the curriculum presents superfluous, watered-down high school material. For the above reason, the methods of my program are soundly elementary child oriented. Material is presented holistically through child related

play activities. Most lessons are self-standing. In each of the weekly forty minute sessions, the students enjoy a variety of activities including acting, modeling, building and drawing. Each lesson's project is designed specifically as a vehicle for a body of information, so that as many facts as possible are worked into the activity itself. When the day's fun is completed, children are usually eager to receive ancillary information about their project. The activity forms a bridge between the child and extra information. In this simple way, complex information is rendered accessible and comprehensible to the elementary student while he plays. Interwoven into the play approach is an ongoing effort to relate everything to the child's own world. An understanding of one's own language and culture is the best springboard for future global appreciation. Thus Granny's porch may help us understand our architectural debt to the Greeks, or the French Religious wars may help in understanding American colonization and the continuing importance of religion in this country. Care is taken throughout the whole sequence to maintain the relationship between people and their language. Language is viewed not as a separate entity, as in high school and college, but as an integral part of a wider cultural whole. Peoples are viewed holistically, and therefore language is introduced as simply another cultural facet, alongside history, geography, art, music and customs.

In the first level of the program students are prepared for the work of the following four years by being introduced to some of the common factors of culture. They learn that cultures all have history, that migration occurs frequently, that different customs are

based on different beliefs, that change is normal in both language and culture. To achieve this appreciation the school year is divided into six equal segments devoted to six different cultures-- Mexican, African, Chinese, Japanese, Indian subcontinental and that of our own classroom. Each lesson is composed of a fun activity which illustrates one of the major principles listed above. The mastery of simple greetings and counting in the major language of each culture logically accompanies this vital approach. At the end of the year students are able to examine the wide cultural influences within their own classroom in a global context. The classroom exemplifies principles common to all cultures. America, like most other cultures, is a global melting pot.

In level two we start an examination of major influences upon the world in which we live by studying Ancient Greece. The year is divided into three major sections each dealing with a different aspect of Greek culture. In section one, we act many of the Greek myths. Their popularity with the students allows relatively unappealing information about vocabulary and phrases derived from these stories to be painlessly absorbed. In section two, each lesson presents an activity which illustrates our cultural debt to Ancient Greece. We construct a Parthenon, make a collage of modern classical architecture, create Greek masks and perform tragedies and comedies outside, become athletes in an Olympic Games, stage the creation of the original Hippocratic oath. In section three, we focus primarily upon the origins and development of our own alphabet. We discover Egyptian hieroglyphics while collecting information to paint murals for a tomb wall. The fun flows easily into writing simple messages

in hieroglyphics on our own cartouches. This knowledge is enriched by a dramatization of Mediterranean trade which reveals how the Egyptian alphabet spread and developed into the Greek alphabet. The creation of an attractive personal coloring book of the Greek letters leads to the discovery of the Greek origins of our own alphabet. Furthermore, by learning to count in Attic Greek, the Greek origins of some of our English words becomes evident. Simple greetings in modern Greek further reinforce the common linguistic base.

Level three continues the activity approach by examining the Roman language and culture in a similar manner. The year begins with groups of "Roman students" marching all over the classroom bringing Pax Romana to other European races and thereby spreading their language and culture. The rest of the year is spent in gradually revealing the many ways in which our culture is indebted to this ancient influence. Topics covered include dress, housing, the town, architecture, the Zodiac, education and the gods. The activity which conveys this cultural material becomes the central core of the lesson, while gradually increasing language learning forms the first and last section of each weekly lesson. Conversational phrases, greetings, counting and total physical response activities (TPR) open the lesson. Vocabulary and English/Latin derivation games end the lesson.

The content of level four and level five have been the most difficult to design since the freedom afforded in the first three levels was not available. Level one through three presented an unfettered opportunity to design a preparatory language course. Levels four and five were immutably scheduled as "French" in

preparation for traditional French studies in the upper school. Ideally level four should be split into two segments in which the student is introduced to both Spanish and French language and culture. At the end of this year the student would choose either language to study in greater depth in preparation for more rigorous upper school studies. As the program currently stands, however, students are able to study only French along with Latin in the upper school. Therefore French alone is offered in both level four and five.

Currently level four begins with the Roman invasion of France and within a few weeks progresses, through drama, to the Norman Conquest of England. Thus, virtually from the outset of the year, students appreciate that despite the Roman invasion of Britain, we owe the majority of the Latin in our English to the Norman French. Thus English, Latin and French are all tied together in a logical context. Through a variety of enjoyable activities, collages, murals, games and models, the year continues to reveal to the students our cultural debt to medieval Europe, and to French culture in particular. Content covered includes Clovis, Charles Martel, Charlemagne, The Arthurian Legend, The Crusades, Feudalism, The Hundred Years' War, Architecture, The Religious Wars, The Italian Wars, The Renaissance, The Golden Age of French Monarchy and, finally, the Revolution of 1789. Customs such as our use of mistletoe at Christmas, the prevalence of Gothic architecture, our insistence upon the right to religious freedom, the rejection of monarchy and a host of other appropriate examples are selected to relate the students' lives to events in France and Europe prior to 1789. As in

level three, language studies open and close the lesson. Conversational phrases and vocabulary are steadily developed through games and TPR, and are finally recorded in a note book for reference purposes throughout levels four and five.

In the first half of level five cultural and language studies progress as in level four. Events between 1789 and today are introduced through activities which further illuminate today's world. Content includes Napoleon, The Restoration, The Second and Third Republics, The Empire, The Franco-Prussian War, The two World Wars and appropriate geographical and political maps. Much of the news on television can be related to these historical topics. Language studies continue to develop the conversational phrases and vocabulary of level four. During the second section of the academic year, this steady development of recorded, oral language continues, whereas the central core of the lesson abandons culture in favor of the basic grammatical principles common to French and Latin. Students will employ these in traditional language study the following year.

Thus by the time our students reach the sixth grade they have a good oral base for both French and Latin and understand many basic grammatical principles which will speed their introduction to both languages. In addition, they appreciate their own language and culture as part of a wider context. Therefore the study of Latin and French seems logical. Moreover, the enthusiasm engendered by the activity approach makes them look ahead to upper school classes with eager anticipation and a greater commitment to pursue language learning. In short, the students enter the upper school suitably

prepared for further studies on the road to global citizenship.

Obviously my program is not the only way to improve the quality of preparation for future language and culture studies. However, if one were to judge by the response of students, parents and administration, it is more in tune with needs at the elementary level than other available programs. The program is a serious attempt to be responsive in the younger grades to the criticism concerning linguistic and cultural ignorance which is unfairly heaped largely on the head of the high school teacher. To use an expression commonly used in England, "one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." My own experience with older students led me to believe that high school was simply too late to start educating for global citizenship. As elementary teachers we have a responsibility to prepare students for what we hope will be offered in the upper grades. However, trivial programs lacking clearly defined, appropriate goals are unlikely to do this. We need to identify the most worthy goal for a "state of the art" language and culture program, improved global proficiency. We should then honestly evaluate our current elementary curriculums and rewrite the majority with this goal in mind.